



News Release

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Breathing Just Got Easier at School

New Air Quality and Activities Guidance Released by Health Officials

(Salt Lake City, UT) - Utah students and school leaders received much needed guidance today on when to schedule indoor rather than outdoor activities based on air quality. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH), the Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other community partners released the guidance that is expected to help students, parents, and schools determine when it is better for children to play indoors.

Patti Tanner, a parent of three children with asthma, and a teacher in the Granite School District, recognizes the issue as one of growing concern. "We really need to help others become aware of this problem. As teachers and parents we could be sending our kids out to play when it isn't healthy for them. This is a real problem for kids, especially those with asthma."

The UDOH/DEQ document called, "Guidance for Schools: When to schedule indoor rather than outdoor activities based on the air quality in your communities," suggests that when the Air Quality Index (AQI), which measures the pollutants in the air, is between 101-150 that 'sensitive students' should be accommodated to avoid outdoor activities. When the AQI is 151 or higher, physical activities should be moved indoors for all students. 'Sensitive students' may include those with: significant or poorly controlled asthma, cystic fibrosis, chronic lung disease, congenital heart disease (requiring medications or having permanent effects) or compromised immune systems.

Schools will not be determining which students are considered sensitive. Parents will need to communicate to schools that they would like their child kept indoors when the air is considered unhealthy for sensitive individuals.

Holly Peterson, associate superintendent in Cache County School District participated in the development of the guidance stating, "The issue of air quality is of great interest to

both the medical and educational community. The safety of students is a primary concern for parents and school personnel. We are pleased with the efforts put forth by dedicated professionals to provide safety guidelines for dealing with air quality.”

Both UDOH and DEQ anticipate the guidance will decrease phone calls and confusion that often plague parents and schools during the inversion months.

The guidance was developed from an Air Quality Forum where several air quality experts, school officials, medical professionals and health officials met to discuss the issue. The forum determined that recommendations should be built upon the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Air Quality Index. The AQI is an index for reporting daily air quality. It standardizes the levels of pollutants onto a scale from 0-500. The index tells you how clean or polluted the air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concerns. When AQI values are above 100, air quality is considered to be unhealthy—at first for certain sensitive groups of people, then for everyone as AQI values get higher.

In the last two years in Salt Lake Valley, there were 43 days when, based on the AQI, sensitive students would have been kept in and only four days when all students would have been kept indoors. However, in Cache Valley, in 2004 alone, there were 15 days when sensitive students would have been kept in and 17 days when all students would have been kept indoors. In addition to the guidance for schools, DEQ recommends carpooling, using mass transit, and conserving energy. For more information on how you can help keep the air clean, visit www.cleanair.utah.gov For the complete guidance, visit www.health.utah.gov/asthma

Individuals interested in learning more about the UDOH’s Asthma Program can contact Mindy Williams at (801) 538-9272 or by e-mail at mawillia@utah.gov.

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